

Opening Lead

- Single most pivotal moment in a deal of Bridge
- While you can't see dummy, there are clues:-
 - Your 13 cards
 - The auction
 - What was the opposing bidding?
 - What other suits did they name before settling on a trump suit (or notrumps)?
 - Did declarer bid them? Or dummy?
 - Did partner bid ?
 - The final contract
 - How many tricks do you need to defeat the contract
 - Are you defending notrumps or trumps ?

Opening Lead cont...

- No Trump Contracts
 - **Length is key in notrumps**. Typically, a race to make a partnership's long suit good (Declarer and Defenders). Lead a long suit, and each time the lead is won, plug away at that suit
 - Typically, the "fourth from the top of your longest and strongest suit" – your partner can then work out where the higher cards are. "Rule of 11" – Take away partner's lead from 11 gives the number of cards higher than the lead in the other three hands. You can see dummy and your hand, so you can work out what the declarer has.
 - Don't lead 4th from the top when opponents could win a cheap trick
 - When your longest suit is headed by three touching cards (AKQ, KQJ, QJ10, J109, 1098). Eg. KQJ75 leading the 7 may not force out the ACE unless partner holds the 10. Instead. **Lead top of a sequence**
 - When you have a near sequence (one card gap between 2nd and third cards KQ1042 QJ965 J10832). **Lead top of the broken sequence.**
 - When you have a higher honour, a gap, and then a two-card sequence (AQJx, AJ10x, A109x, K109x, Q109x) **Lead top of the interior sequence**
 - Top of a sequence however not always advisable especially if opponents bid that suit
 - When to lead an Ace ?
 - Certainly with 3 card sequence and the broken sequence
 - However leading ace from Akxx can also be best as you may be able to fell a doubleton queen and promote partner's jack, and you retain the lead, and can judge having seen dummy and the contents of Trick One, whether to abandon the suit and switch to a more promising looking line of defense.
 - When not to lead from your Length ?
 - When opponents bid it
 - When your partner has bid
 - If partner opened then it may be weak e.g. Jxxx but his hand may be stronger than yours, and therefore more entries
 - If partner overcalled then it will be stronger and tends to be lead directing
 - If partner signalled a Lead Directing Double or Slam Lightner Double
 - When opposition more likely to set up their length first. E.g. lack of entries.
 - Lead should try to help promote partner's better hand
 - What to lead to Partner ?
 - Traditionally, it was "top of partner's suit" (regardless). While simple, has proved to be too costly releasing precious honours is too wasteful.
 - Best is simply to lead the normal card (ie. The card you would lead if partner had not bid the suit). You can always unblock if necessary, on subsequent tricks.

Opening Lead cont...

- Suit Contracts

- Length is of far less importance due to risk of being trumped
- Four main defensive objectives

- To trump “ruff”
- To cash high cards
- To promote high cards
- To give nothing away

- Attractive Leads

- If partner has signalled a Lead directing Double or Slam lightner Double, lead that, otherwise
- Best lead is Ace from AK then Ace from AKx..x
- Next best would be a singleton (not trumps) which is a gamble but very powerful – especially when holding Ace of Trumps and accompanying low trumps
- Then Ace from top of a sequence so that you can have a look at dummy. (NB. only 2 cards required in the sequence for Suit contracts as opposed to 3 for Notrumps)
- If partner has bid, lead the normal card of that suit, ie. The same as you would lead if partner had not bid it. That means low from a significant honour.
- Top of a sequence always a good lead but less effective as the cards get lower. (NB. The lead promises the card below and denies the card above) e.g. KQxx, QJxx, J10xx, 109xx
- Doubletons, trumps, and strong suits headed by broken honours are not very attractive leads.

- When you don't have an attractive lead, eliminate the horrible leads:-

- Never underlead an Ace
- Only lead a singleton trump when partner has doubled a part-score contract
- Other Trump leads only where you need to cut down oppositions “ruffing value” or trumping potential but e.g. leading from Qxx is throwing your Queen away or another trump lead may waste partners potential Trump tricks.
- Doubleton leads should be avoided unless your hand is very weak, or partner has bid the suit. If you do lead a Doubleton,
 - lead from top as “high low” shows partner it's a doubleton. NB low high guarantees another card
 - Honour doubleton ranking would be
 1. Kx – High Risk strategy that will work when partner holds the ace or the queen but not otherwise
 2. Jx – Quite apart from the sacrifice of the card, partner will think you are leading top of a sequence
 3. Ax- Catching nothing with an Ace is a big loss, even though you have voided yourself with the second card
 4. Qx - Quite apart from the sacrifice of the card, partner will think you are leading top of a sequence
- Top of Interior Sequences should also be avoided – best to wait for that suit to be led
- Notrumps - 4th highest longest and strongest probably not a good lead

- When horrible leads have been eliminated what else ?

- “High for Hate” – lead high in a suit you do not want your partner to return. E.g holding 8763 lead the 7.
- “Low for Like” – lead low in a suit to encourage partner to return Eg. holding KJ73 lead the 3. Q1052 lead the 2. NB. For KQ62 lead the K (top of a sequence)
- Important to Note that the same principles apply during the defense of the hand.

Opening Lead cont...

- Promote high cards by:-
 - a) **Force** – with KQxxx lead K to force out A
 - b) **Position** – where you use your position on the table (relative to the dummy) to defensively “finesse” or promote your team’s high cards
 - e.g. holding QJxx with Kx in dummy. Lead the Q – if partner has the A, Dummy K will not make. If opp holds the Ace, Jack is promoted.
- Consider the Bidding before deciding what to lead
 - Shape – try to work out the shape of the opposing hands. The longer the auction, the more information you have
 - Negative Inference – What did the other players not do !
 - E.g.
 - 1♦ pass 1♥ pass 2♣ pass 3♦ pass 3NT pass
 - Superficially you might think a spade was the obvious lead (unbid suit)
 - Think further – guess Opener’s shape - 5-4 in the minors and volunteered no trumps after hearing partners hearts. You would think he has a well stopped three-card spade holding (the unbid suit), so therefore he probably has a singleton heart. When you consider his partner could not repeat hearts, and that your partner did not overcall 1♠, hearts start to look the more appealing suit
 - When holding ♠KJ2 ♥743 ♦K63 ♣10986 against 4♥. If the bidding went:-
 - 1♥ p 2♥ p 4♥ - **Lead ♣10**. With little information, top of a sequence works best
 - 1♥ p 1♠ p 2♣ 4♥ - **Lead ♦3** – Your finessable holding in dummy’s bid suit (spades) is a worry. Attack the unbid suit
 - 1♥ p 2♣ p 2♥ p 3♥ p 4♥ - **Lead ♥3**. Here, your four-card holding in dummy’s bid suit (clubs) may inconvenience declarer (although partner will need an honour). This suggests a more passive approach. Plus, the opponents have bid slowly to 4H, so have little to spare. Avoid giving away a trick on lead (as each side-suit may), and declarer may struggle.
 - 1♥ p 2♦ p 2♥ p 4♥ - **Lead ♠2**. Dummy’s diamond bid is worrying, for your ♦Kxx sitting under the strength looks very vulnerable. The club lead rates to be too slow, so lead an attacking Spade in the hope that partner holds the queen or ace. Its probably your only chance.

Opening Lead cont...

- Summary
 - Notrump Contracts-
 - Standard play, focusing on length, is “4th from the top of your longest (and strongest) suit”.
 - When not to lead “fourth highest” ?
 1. Different Card in longest suit
 - a) Three touching/near-touching high cards: lead top of sequence bit. E.g. **K**QJx, **K**Q10x, **K**J10x, **A**KJx.
 - b) No honour: Lead high-for-hate. E.g. **8**7432, **9**8632
 2. Different Suit altogether
 - a) Partner bid or Lead Directing Double: lead his suit
 - b) Opponents bid your suit
 - Trump Contracts
 - The Lead Line below (giving the standard card to lead from a suit, depending on your holding):
 - At the risk of over-simplification (because the auction gives so many extra clues that are not factored in)
 - The Good
 - Ace from ace-king (best)
 - Side-suit Singleton
 - Partners Suit or LDD (lead normal card)
 - Top-of-a-sequence (of two)
 - The Bad (well middling)
 - Top-from-two-cards (Doubleton)
 - Trumps
 - High-for-hate (from rubbish)
 - Low-for-like (broken honours)
 - The Ugly
 - Away from an Ace

The Lead Line			
<i>Card Led....</i>	A K Q J 10	9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2	
<i>Meaning....</i>	Shows card below Denies card above	High for Hate	Low for Like

Opening Lead cont...

- For suit contracts, it is perhaps helpful to think of each type of lead as having a base utility (out of 10). Ace from ace-king would be 10, a singleton 9, king from king-queen 7, away from a king 2, away from an ace 0 etc. The bidding alters that utility number.
- For example, if the opponents bid your singleton suit, its utility goes down from 9 to a 7. It may still be your best lead, but it may not; if you have, say, a queen from queen-jack, a 6 to start with, that 6 would increase to 8 if it was the only unbid suit, so overtaking the singleton.
For starters, let's assign an initial utility to the following holdings (assume it's a trump contract, and these holdings are not in trumps):

Holding	Initial Utility	Revised Utility	Reason
AK74	10		
3	9	7	If opponents bid your singleton suit
KQJ6	8		
KQ76	7		
QJ104	7		
QJ52	6	8	If the only unbid suit
83	5		
852	4		
Q952	4		
J4	3		
K752	2		
A1074	0		